

1: Holmberg--37-38

(1941-42) 1950

Siriono

116, 527, 273, 222

"Accompanying the frustrations of forest life are occasional drinking bouts, which vary in frequency with the quantity of wild bee honey available. Since this product is most abundant in the dry season—after the flowering of the plants and [38] trees—most of them thus occur during the months of August, September, October, and November."

"Mead is made from a mixture of cooked corn meal (or cooked manioc or cooked camotes), water, and wild bee honey. It is always made by the women. The maize is first ground up fine in a mortar. The corn meal is then mixed with water and boiled in a clay pot until it becomes thick gruel. The hot gruel (not masticated as by many South American Indians) is then emptied into calabashes (containing only a small round hole at the top), each of which is about half-filled with cold water, until they are filled to about four-fifths of their capacity. After the gruel and the water have been thoroughly mixed with a small stick, about half a cup of wild honey for each quart of mixture is added to the calabashes. The honey is then stirred into the mixture, and the holes of the calabashes are loosely stopped with leaves of patujú to keep out flies and to allow some air for fermentation. The calabashes are then stored (undisturbed) in hanging baskets for about 3 days, when the brew is considered to be of sufficient force (about the strength of beer) to be drunk.

In making other types of beer the same process is followed, the only difference being that manioc (or camotes) is substituted for maize in making the gruel. To increase the strength of the beer, to make it more nourishing, and to hasten the fermentation process, boiled or baked corn-meal cakes are sometimes added to the brew."

1: Holmberg--38 [2]
116, 273, 415

(1941-42) 1950

Siriono

"Calabashes are considered to be the most suitable type of vessel for fermenting native beer, although when there was a shortage of these vessels I observed that it was fermented in long sections of bamboo."

"The making of mead is accompanied by considerable excitement and bustle. Great care is taken to see that the mixture turns out all right. There are always plenty of children present hoping to get a bit of the honey, and the women usually do not lack helpers, since jealous neighbors, generally uncooperative, offer their services in the hope that they too will get a chance to partake of the honey while the mead is being made. More often than not they are brushed off and return to their hammocks unrewarded."

"Drinking bouts usually start informally. The man possessing the liquor invites a number of his male relatives to join him in consuming what beer he may have on hand. Bouts generally start in the afternoon, and, depending upon the quantity of liquor available, may last until far into the night or even be continued on the following day. The participants squat in a circle near the host's hammock, and as a calabash of mead is passed around, each in his turn drinks heavy draughts before passing it to the next person in the circle. The drinking is always accompanied by continual smoking of clay pipes (also passed around the circle), which ultimately contributes as much or more to the resulting intoxicated or drugged condition as does the somewhat light and nourishing native beer."

"As a drinking feast progresses, the Siriono, who is a very uncommunicative fellow when sober, becomes an animated conversationalist, a performer, and a braggart. At the opening of the bout the talk usually turns to the merits of the liquor. One of my more poetic informants, Erésa-eánta (Strong-eyes), used to say, in describing the liquor at the start of almost every drinking feast: 'Yesterday it was without force, like water or like earth, but today it has great strength.' As the effects of the drinking and the smoking begin to be felt, one or more of the participants breaks out in song, usually impromptu and related to some exploit of which he is particularly proud, such as the killing of a tapir or a harpy eagle. Another may be engaged in discussing the desirability of looking for a new wife (always a young one or yukwáki) or of casting out the shrew he now has. As the mood gets mellower everyone joins the singing, and when the party has reached an advanced stage almost everyone is singing a different tune at the same time.

While attending these drinking feasts, I tried my best to record a number of these songs, but I was never able to set down more than snatches of them because of the bedlam and the darkness existing at the time. Moreover, since most of the participants, following a drinking bout, were victims of alcoholic amnesia, brutal hangovers, and high anxieties, it was impossible to get much cooperation from them in this matter later."

"At every drinking feast of any size most of the nonparticipating members of the group are assembled at the edge of the circle. The spectators amuse themselves listening to the songs and the conversation, commenting on the course of the feast, and waiting for the participants to get drunk enough so that they can sneak a drink now and [39] then. Children are always present, eagerly awaiting the emptying of a calabash, since it is then passed to them to drain the dregs. The women are almost always in the background watching over their husbands, because they are quite certain from previous experience that the party will end in a brawl. This is always the case when there is sufficient liquor. A man deep in his cups will turn to another (it may be his brother, uncle, his son-in-law, or even his father-in-law) and insult him with some such phrase as 'Etómi túti nde' ('You are very lazy') or 'Ai í tendé gátu' ('You never bring me meat with any fat on it'). He will be answered in the same vein, and a fight will soon break out. The Siriono do not fight with their fists at this time; physical aggression is expressed in the form of a wrestling match, in which one participant tries to throw the other to the ground again and again until he is too exhausted to rise. Since the contestants are usually so drunk that they cannot stand up, these wrestling matches frequently terminate with both of them passed out on the floor much to the merriment of the spectators. Not infrequently, however, one or the other (or both) falls into one of the innumerable fires in every Siriono hut and gets badly burned."

"When the party reaches the fighting stage the crying women intervene and try to stop the fights. At this time they too come in for their share of aggression and not infrequently are struck forcibly by their husbands. However, I heard of only one case in which a man murdered his wife in one of these drinking bouts. This happened approximately 15 years ago, the wife being shot through the heart with an arrow. Although overt aggression runs high during drinking feasts, after they are over the participants usually suppress their angry feelings within a few days' time, and all is normal again until another drinking bout takes place. Insofar as I observed little sexual activity takes place during or immediately after drinking feasts. Participants are usually too drunk to indulge in sex."

1: Holmberg--39 [2]
116, 273, 574

(1941-42) 1950

Siriono

"When a considerable supply of honey is available, drinking bouts are timed so as to take place every few days until all the liquor is gone. For lack of honey, however, not more than a dozen are likely to occur during the year. A man who has given a feast expects to be invited to and is expected (wants) to attend those given by the people who participated in his. As most of the people who take part in these feasts are near relatives, this almost always happens."

"In only one instance did I notice that the aggressions of the drinking feasts were the direct cause of strained relations for a long period of time. During a bout in August 1941, Eantádu (Father-of-Strong-one), a chief, insulted and wrestled when drunk with Erésá-eánta (Strong-eyes), his cousin, or father's sister's son, over questions of food. Eantádu when drunk told Erésá-eánta that he never brought him any food, that he never hunted spider monkeys, that he was lazy, that he was evil, etc. Although neither participant knew much about what he was doing, a wrestling match ensued in which Erésá-eánta got badly burned in the fire, and he was unable to get out of his hammock for several days. As a result of this fight, about which Erésá-eánta was later told by his wives and brothers, strained relations persisted until January 1942, when I first saw the two together again at a drinking feast given by Eantádu—one which, incidentally, did not end in a brawl, as the liquor ran out. After recovering from the first drinking feast, Erésá-eánta with a couple of his brothers and their families remained away from the band for long periods of time, hunting, fishing, collecting, and attending their gardens at a nearby lake. Although the party returned to Tibaera from time to time for a few days or a week, Erésá-eánta would have no relations whatever with Eantádu, even though their respective wives were friendly enough. After relations had been reestablished at the second drinking feast, however, the two continued on friendly terms."

"Like the men, the women too have their drinking feasts, but these do not usually terminate as roughly as those of the men. In five of these feasts which I observed, singing was the prominent feature apart from the drinking and smoking. Although the women accused each other of having had sexual relations with one another's husbands, most of them had reached such an intoxicated condition by the time these accusations were made that they were placed in their hammocks to sleep it off.

In only one instance did I observe mixed drinking. This involved three old women and their husbands and brothers. On this occasion, however, only a few calabashes of mead were available, and the party was not organized in any way."

"The importance of singing at drinking feasts has already been stressed. The songs sung at this time, like those sung in the early morning, are largely impromptu. To record them without instruments is next to an impossibility, because the singers are drunk and mouth their words more than usual. Insofar as I was able to determine, however, they are stylized only as to form and rhythm and never as to content. Informants said that when drunk they sang whatever rhythmical combinations came into their heads."

1: Holmberg--62 [3]
116, 152, 527, 578, 273, 626

(1941-42) 1950

Siriono

"Drinking feasts are occasions on which much latent antagonism and aggression are expressed between men. At these feasts men openly air their complaints, whether these have to do with food, with sex, or with any other subject of contention. The disputes are settled by wrestling matches, and are usually forgotten after the period of drunkenness is over. It is interesting to note that aggression at drinking feasts is limited to wrestling matches; any other type of fighting is frowned upon and is usually stopped by non-participant men and women. On one occasion Eantádu, when drunk, struck an opponent with his fists. Everyone began to clamor that he was fighting unfairly, 'like a white man.' He stopped immediately."

"Smoking and drinking. — According to Wegner (1934 a, p. 178) the Siriono were fond of mead and of maize or manioc beer, which they brewed in 'large pots' without the addition of saliva. The speechless Quruñgu'á are said to have prepared mead in holes dug in the ground lined with leaves. It must be remembered, however, that Cardús (1886, p. 281) states the Siriono made mead in small wooden 'mortars.' "